Margaret Kelly's Wake"

The Black Cat

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van Houten's Cocoa

When Fatigued Drink Van Houten's Cocoa.

MISTRESS: I feel so tired, Mary. What have you brought?

MAID: A cup of tea, Madam, I thought it would refresh you.

MISTRESS: The Doctor says I am not to drink tea, Mary; it is not good for the nerves, so take it away again. Bring me a cup of Van Houten's Cocoa which is recommended as soothing to the nerves, and refreshing. I think it a delicious beverage and it smells so enticing. And, Mary, see that your stock of Van Houten's Cocoa does not run out.

MAID: Yes M'am. (*Exit.*)

Sold at all grocery stores. Order it next time.

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The Black Cat

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Margaret Kelly's Wake.*

BY S. C. BREAN.— (C. E. BARNS.)

THE white-capped nurse bent over the railing between the two tall globes. "Margaret Kelly, Ward 29, is dead," she said softly. Before the official in blue she laid the usual slip, and then glided away like a phantom.

Acting Superintendent Rickard glanced up at the clock high on the whitewashed wall at his left. It lacked twelve minutes of midnight. Mechanically he drew from a drawer some black-bordered blanks and turned to the ledger.

It was a plain ambulance case. The woman had been picked up unconscious in a West-Side alley three nights before. She was, apparently, one of that vast sweep of human driftwood which ebbs and flows through a great metropolis, leaving no trace. "Tim," he called out to the sleepy attendant bunched up in the corner. "Go down into the property-room and see if among the effects of Margaret Kelly, Ward 29, there is anything by which we can identify her."

"Right, sor," yawned the Dublinite, shuffling along the tiling and down into the lower quarters of Bellevue's mazes.

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* The writer of this story received a cash prize of $500 in THE BLACK CAT story contest ending March 31, 1900.

Tim soon returned. Quite triumphantly he laid before his principal three letters, a bank's certificate of deposit for no mean sum, and two receipted bills — all bearing the name, "Margaret Kelly, West Thirty-third Street." The official glanced them over, making copious notes. It was not often that he so misjudged a common ambulance case. Out of the aggregation the superintendent secured five city addresses.

By the first morning's mail five friends and relatives of the late Margaret Kelly received the shocking tidings of her untimely demise, and each apprised five and twenty more. By ten o'clock there were gathered together in those three quaint rooms in the very heart of "Hell's Kitchen" where Margaret Kelly, spinster, had lived her narrow and solitary life, no less than forty persons more or less near and dear to the deceased, falling upon one another's necks, sobbing — but with one eye open to prospective loot and the other vigilantly fastened upon the co-heirs.

For, be it known, "M's Kelly" had long been recognized as the richest woman in that whole thickly-tenemented block, as well as the most locally famous character. She was the only one of ten children who had never married. They often affirmed that there was a romance in the case concerning a gallant young countryman, who, after a strange misunderstanding, fled to Australia.

Certain it was that years ago Margaret had renounced the roseate sphere of matrimony for the fatter-pursed one of parsimony. With an amazing faculty for making money and a still more remarkable talent for saving it, she became the envy of her poverty-burdened sisters and the idol of multitudinous nephews and nieces, who more than once fell to warring over her favors. Moreover, Margaret was of a muscular mould which had won for her the sobriquet "the Amazon of Hell's Kitchen," with a tongue that wielded a lash of blue flame in righteous wrath, and a fighting valor in local inter-tenement warfare that made her highly respected, to say the least.

And yet, with all her disillusions of the heart, with all privation and trained avarice, Margaret was blessed with a big Irish heart upon which all her blood relatives pulled a close string. Many is the kinsman saved from actual dispossession, shipped back to the dear old Emerald Isle to die, or whose children were married or

buried at Margaret's expense — even though these bounties narrowed her down to a bread-and-tea diet for weeks to right her conscience and recoup her purse.

How glowingly now were recounted these manifold good deeds! What tender reminiscences and grateful benedictions! Yet how deeper than all was the impatience of the heirs to discover the exact extent of those mysterious possessions before which Death had at last lifted the veil! Hours of delicious sorrow and melting eulogy concealed a killing impatience to get down to business.

It was "Longshoreman Mike," the eldest of the nearest of kin, who took upon himself the office of chief of that clan of bandit mourners — bandits first and mourners afterward. Upon him devolved the task of breaking into chests, hampers and bureau-drawers, bringing forth secret treasures of silk, Irish lace, whitest linen and gowns that never saw the light save on St. Patrick's Day or at a wedding, passing these back to the weeping ones who properly gushed afresh over each discovery, apportioning them among themselves with self-righteous justice.

When five bankbooks were found in a bunch, there was the hush of the sepulchre till the exact aggregation was known; but when from the remote depths of a sheet-iron chest there was brought a brown woolen stocking so suspiciously heavy that the treasure-trover himself widened his eyes as he came forth to empty its contents upon the oilcloth table, there was excitement indeed. A stream of gold in the coin of many realms, to the count of twelve hundred dollars, lay before them. Every heart was fired with amazement as well as cupidity, the embarassment being relieved by Longshoreman Mike, who spoke with veritable inspiration:

"God's blessin' on the dear soul!" he sobbed, tossing the stocking into the coal-box. "Our dear Margaret must have the foinest funeral and the most glorious wake iver known in the Ward!"

"Roight and proper!" chimed in a chorus, while tears — not all of grief — coursed many a grimy furrow. Then Mike, the recognized head, was appointed to take care of "the yaller," to give the orders, and pay the price. "But moind now!" cautioned one, "a shtrict accounting to us all. We're all of one blood, saints save us! but business is business, even bechune rilatives!" With one hand on his heart and eyes uplifted to the vision of the winged

Margaret, Mike took the superfluous pledge. Then he proceeded to affairs of state.

It required the remainder of the day. The orders prepaid to undertaker, caterer, florist and corner liquor dealer were such as to give "Hell's Kitchen" shortness of breath. It even put to shame the New Year's feasts of the Ward Heelers' Club, already locally classic. On the following morning, then, all arrayed in their finest, the forty mourners left the tradesmen in the three little rooms to complete their tasks, and, with hearse in state, started, nine carriages strong, toward Bellevue.

There the first shudder awaited them. They were informed that the body of their dear Margaret had been conveyed to the morgue — that sombre pile on the edge of East River. Thither they repaired, with many groanings.

The interior of that structure resembles a safety-deposit vault under a clear dome. A hundred small steel doors close upon the row on row of separate graves of unknown and pauper dead. Morgue-Keeper Fane met the solemn concourse in the tiled corridor. He learned their mission and then led them, all shuddering and huddled with horror, through the great gates and down half-way along the bleak rows, halting before a door whereon was seen a card slipped behind a tiny pane, the name of the occupant pen-printed upon it.

The mourners shrivelled nearer, jamming their kerchiefs into their mouths, breathless in silence. The door swung wide. Seizing the sliding litter, the morgue-keeper drew it half-way out, disclosing the upper half of its lifeless burden, and stood gazing into the semicircle of expressionless faces about him.

There was no chorus of wails, no fainting, no tearing of hair. Instead, it was Mike who broke the appalling spell with a gulp of protest. "Look 'ere — m' Gawd!" he choked. "Thot ain't Margaret Kelly, you blunderin' idjit — "

"Isn't it, though?" rebuked the custodian, re-examining the card.

"Naw!" came back the rebuff, with the reinforcement of clenched fists shaken menacingly, for Mike had sampled the stock of the wake quite to the fighting point. "Thot ain't our Margaret. Why, sor, if anny livin' man were to tell the corpse

of the rale Margaret Kelly that she looked the loikes o' that, she'd rise up off that slab and break his face, so she would. Our Margaret Kelly, sir, was six foot one, and ivery inch a leddy!"

A volley of reinforcing protest supplemented this family columbiad delivered with such proud gusto. The morgue-keeper pushed back the litter, closed the door and fled to the telephone in his private office. "Superintendent," he said, calling up Bellevue, "the friends of the late Margaret Kelly, whose body was brought down here last night, fail to identify. There is a mistake somewhere."

"Hold the wire," came the anxious answer.

Down into the property-room the superintendent hastened on a tour of investigation. He returned a few minutes later, his face blazing. "Tim," he growled out to the sleepy attendant in the corner, "you are discharged!" Then over the 'phone again, "It was all the fault of my blundering help here," he said. "He gave me the wrong documents out of the property-room. You see, there were *two* Margaret Kellys: One an unknown, Ward 29; the other, Margaret Kelly, of West Thirty-third Street, Ward 31. You've got the unknown down there. The other was just discharged fifteen minutes ago, alive and well. Break the good news to the mourners, with apologies, et cetera. Good-bye!"

Joyously the morgue-keeper conveyed the glad tidings to the assembled forty. They stood still in mute amazement, with dry eyes and limp jaws, literally frozen to the stone tiling. "Good Gawd, mon! Y' don't really mane to tell me that Margaret Kelly's aloive — "

"Precisely, sir."

"Howly Mither!" And Mike felt his soul ooze out of his shoes. To face Margaret Kelly dead were disagreeable enough, but to face her alive now — the very thought drove him into the corner, where he took six fingers of liquid reinforcement at a gulp and tossed the flask through the rear door into the river. As there were murmurs of a lynching, Morgue-Keeper Fane retreated into the autopsy room.

Meanwhile a most impressive personage alighted from a Seventh Avenue car at the Thirty-Third Street corner and started westward. As she turned into her familiar doorway, a bevy of little children uttered a combined shriek and ran pell-mell into hiding. In the

gloom of the first landing she greeted an old friend, who immediately threw up her hands and fell in a dead faint. By the time she had reached her own apartments on the third floor, the newcomer was in a mood for any surprises.

She found plenty of them. The caterer was uncovering a big frosted cake, the florist was banking the mantel with white roses and the liquor dealer was setting up a miniature gin-mill in the corner cupboard. At the threshold the intruder paused, her face blank as a bluestone image, her shoulders thrown back and knuckles dug deep into her ribs. Finally she found voice:

"Oh ho, now!" she droned. "An' what's all this? A weddin'?"

The man in the white apron gave her a glance of contempt over his rampart of bottles. "Weddin' nothing," he snarled. "Can't yer see it's a funer'l?"

The woman's keen eyes blinked. A hideous smile played over the bloodless lips. "Railly now — a funer'l! I niver would have known it." Then with bitter sarcasm, "Do y' moind tellin' me whose funeral it is?"

"Why, poor old Margaret Kelly's funeral, o' course."

The newcomer strained up on her very tiptoes with gathering scorn, the unkempt feathers upon her grizzled head brushing the door-frame above. "The divvil it is!" she groaned, taking a forward step and clenching her big red fists. "An' do y' moind tellin' me who's goin' to pay for Margaret Kelly's funeral?"

The man in the apron gave a shrug. "Oh, don't *you* worry," he said. "It's all paid for."

The frame of a giantess swelled like a thundercloud. "With whose money, you young blackguard — with whose money?"

The man pointed to the rifled iron chest in the corner. "To be sure, with Margaret Kelly's money — whose else?"

He might have said more, but the Nemesis of "Hell's Kitchen" was upon him in an instant, and riot began. There were wailings and tearing of hair, the woman supplying the wailings, the men the hair. "Out with y', dogs, brutes, varmin, brigands!" she screamed, making terrific onslaught upon both tradesmen and their wares, seizing a floral piece bearing the words "Gone Home" in red carnations on a field of white roses, and smashing it upon

the florist's head. "'Gone Home,' is it?" she cried, "Y' mean 'Come Home,' y' pirates — yes, come home just in time to save a rag or two to me back and the price of a loaf. Out wid y', haythen, vipers, robbers! Out wid y', or I'll murder y' all in cold blood, by the saints, so I will. Och, mither, mither! Am I alive or am I dead?" And as there seemed to be no doubt about it in the minds of the vanquished, the tradesmen fled in confusion, dodging bottles of the peaty old Irish which narrowly missed them and crashed against the stair wall, leaving great stains. Then into the armchair the Amazon flopped in a state of semi-hysterics amid the wreckage, while on emerging from the lower door the tradesmen ran into the melancholy procession on the way from Bellevue and the morgue. "Go, call the police!" cried one. "There is a mad woman upstairs pounding the place to atoms."

"Better the place than me," responded the mourner chief with a sigh, proceeding still slower. It was a sorrowful band that had started out an hour before; but for blue devils of despair it was nothing compared with the return journey, which resembled a march of martyrs to the gibbet.

By the time the last landing was reached, the forty were reduced to just six, and they the heaviest weights of the crowd. Guardedly they peeped around corners and through the door-chinks, confronting at last that portraiture of wasted rage and woe pinioned down by utter collapse in the midst of her ravage. Then, with haggard eyes and hanging jaws, in fawning suppliance they advanced, pouring out their inmost souls:

"Glory be to hiven, Margaret Kelly!" cried Mike, "sure it was all a mistake. It weren't you at all, at all; but some other miserable outcast craythur wid your own name, Margaret Kelly, that were lyin' stiff in the margue, while you, the saints be praised! are home here wid us, aloive and well, and we ag'in the happiest mortals on earth — "

The swollen eyes widened, and a sinister gleam broke from their depths. "Y' look it!" shot back the shaft of irony, "y' look it — Divvil take the whole boonch!" Then, in the bitter silence, "So y' t'ought there was goin' to be a funeral and a wake did y'? Well, if you had come ten minutes sooner, there would have been — several."

One after another the mourners crept back and began restoring the lace, silk, shawls, gowns and all as to a shrine. It was a pitiful rite, performed in silence; for, as nothing could possibly be said in mitigation of their unknowing offence, they said nothing.

It was only Mike who had the courage of his vindication now: "Y' must not blame us, Margaret," he groaned. Great globules of sweat gathered in the wrinkles as he drew forth the summons from the hospital. "Look at this black-bordered liar, Margaret, look at it! Ah, Margaret, it is yourself that has a pretty case against the city for funeral expinses over a live corpse, and heavy damages for wounded affections — "

"Shut up wid your politics!" yelped the convalescent, "and give me a small dhrop of whushky, or I'll have a raylapse, and then you'll have me where you want me — tin feet under sod."

There was a skurrying to do her bidding. Margaret drank deep. Rallying, she looked abroad over the wreckage of her madness. Then a new terror came into her soul. "Moike, Moike!" she groaned, "tell me now, on your honor before God, what have y' done wid that shtockin?"

The big longshoreman staggered back. A sudden sickness took the courage out of his heart. He set his teeth and threw out his arms like a gorilla at bay. "Margaret Kelly," he moaned, "there's no use lyin' to y', an' by the saints, I won't. The shtockin' — well, here goes! The shtockin' is gone!"

The convalescent rose, but fell back again. "Gone — gone?" she cried in a voice that brought terror to every listener.

"At least, more than half of it, Margaret. There were twelve hundred dollars in the black rag — "

"Nothing more?"

"May God judge me!" was the answer, as the longshoreman thrust up his clenched hands till they almost struck the ceiling, as if his honor had been impeached. "We counted it there on the table, all of us; and then I threw the shtockin' into the coal-box."

The convalescent covered her face with her hands. "Now you have killed me," she moaned. "Merciful saints! What have I done to bring down upon me such afflictions?"

The accused took a stride forward. "Margaret, say whativer you will, I swear there was not one penny more than — "

"Divvil take the money!" screamed the convalescent, striking her forehead. "Did I say annything about money, man?"

"But, Margaret — er — "

"I didn't mean money. I meant — something else — " The swaying figure bowed in an attitude of silent grief.

The longshoreman glanced into the astonished faces, then swept his hand over his forehead with a significant sign. Had poor Margaret lost her mind? He pressed closer. "For the love of hiven, Margaret," he pursued, "what do you mane? What was in that black shtockin' — "

"Something worth more than life to me," she answered calmer now, although it was the calm of despair. "And now it's gone and me poor heart is broke, me poor heart is broke."

The clustering group stood dumb. What beside the gold did the old black stocking contain? Visions of diamonds, pearls and other precious treasures swept before them, supplementing the recollections of the bank-books and securities. Only "Longshoreman Mike" seemed to possess presence of mind now. He backed over to the coal-box and began digging with his great chimpanzee-like claws among the coals. Suddenly his square-jowled visage uplifted triumphantly. In his clutch he dragged the black length to view like a python from its lair. "Here it is, Margaret," he cried, "just as I threw it aside." He came forward and threw the rag into the convalescent's lap.

A sudden change came over the whole attitude. A new strength came into Margaret Kelly, a new illumination, a sort of spiritual revelation enveloping her. Into the dark depths she thrust her hand. Before the amazed eyes of the onlookers, who thought the receptacle empty, Margaret drew forth a faded letter and a small photograph, which was more than half obliterated with kisses. One grateful look, and the woman fell forward upon her knees, pouring out her heart in thankful prayer, burying her face in the simple tokens.

The assembled kith and kin gazed upon this drama of a solitary life as if it were quite beyond their solving. No one ventured a word, yet every one knew that for the first time in all their lives they had turned the one forbidden page in the lonely spinster's history of long watching and sustaining hope.

"Oh, Moike!" cried the woman, regaining her seat and thrusting the tender tokens into her bosom. "It's all turnin' out right, and I'm a sorry wretch not to be thankful for many blissin's, so I am. Did you say that it were a poor outcast who were mistaken for me down there in the dead house? Then go back with the hearse and shroud and all, for which, please God, I'll have no use for many a year, and bring the poor haythin craythur here, where we'll give her a dacint burial as one of our very own. Aye, don't stand starin' at me loike that, fer I'm not gone daft. I mane it all, ivery word. I don't care what may be her pasht or prisent. No one that bears the name of Margaret Kelly shall go to the Potther's Field while I live to chate the grave-digger."

The longshoreman stood aghast. "Do you really mane it, Margaret?" he queried, with surprise lighting up that look of compassion.

"From the botthom of me heart, I do," was the firm rejoinder. "Go bring the poor wretch from that accursed place; for, bad as 'Hell's Kitchen' may be, the margue, God save us from it! is worse. Bring her here in the little black house I thank hiven I have no use for, even if I do own it; and we'll give the stranger such a funeral as was niver known in the Ward, so we will —"

"An' his honor, the Mayor, shall pay the freight, eh?"

"Right and truly. Call the praist too, and do it all up in the dacentest style of the art, jus' as if it were for me. But first, jus' another wee dhrop and all join in, to swear that we're glad we're livin', nor jilious of the dead for all the good said of 'em."

The guests drew near, clapping their hands with joy — they who were but an hour gone wielding their cambrics. "Margaret, you're a trump and no mistake!" cried Mike, striking his chest.

"Long live Aunt Margaret! It's we who are proud of you, b' hivens!" chimed in the chorus. Then, amid much fluttering and sputtering, the pledge of family fealty was passed from heart to heart — such a pledge as was never known in all that humble region before. Soon after Longshoreman Mike drove away with the undertaker, while all hands fell to putting things to rights again after the ravage, pondering meanwhile not more upon the miracle of that good soul's home-coming than upon the romance about which she had so long remained silent.

Late in the evening of that eventful day the assembled forty, now generously reinforced by as many more, for the tidings of the hour had travelled fast and far, sat semicircled about the hostess, arrayed in her smartest gown. They were willing tarryers, for the bounty was of excellent variety and abundance — "the thrate of his Honor the Mayor," as Margaret grandiloquently termed it, — offering that dignitary at least one toast in four, reserving the rest for herself.

But when the undertaker's attendants entered the populous tenement, and above the measured tread of the bearers of the heavy burden could hear the longshoreman's, 'Stiddy now! Thrate her like one of us. Careful around the turn now, do y' moind!" a shudder ran through the assemblage, for every one realized the presence of the dead in truth.

With many puffings and grunts that sounded above the awful hush, the "little black house," now occupied by an unexpected tenant, was deposited in the further room from the crowded chamber where feasting and good cheer were so suddenly quelled by the tragedy of life.

"Only to think of it!" Margaret kept echoing over and over. "Here I am, aloive and well, wid all me good frinds about me, and there, alone, unknown, frindless, widout even a mourner — "

"Come, dry up, Margaret, for the love o' hiven!" put in Mike, entering the room and facing the pallid faces, "and be glad thot it ain't yourself. Ah, but she has a smile on her face, that poor sufferin' nobody, as if she knew that now, even if none cared for her livin', we all are doin' our best for her dead. Come in, folks. Come in and take a look of the poor outcast, for, damme, she has the look of havin' been onct a rale leddy. Come in —"

"Niver!" A voice broke out of the chorus of shudders.

"But *I* will!" It was Margaret who leaped up courageously, as if to challenge them all. "I'm not afraid of the woman who bears me name, dead or aloive. Lead on, Moike."

Mike led, and the company, all a-tremble, snailed a long way after them. Suddenly a strange low cry came from the far chamber. It nearly froze the hearts of the listeners, for they realized that it was Margaret's. Instantly she came plunging back, her face expressive of emotion almost tragic, and flung

herself into the chair again, seizing the glass which rattled against her teeth as she drank with a choking sound. "It is Margaret Kelly — it is, it is!" she moaned. "Ah, my God! will miracles never cease?"

The company pressed about her with eyes darting flames of terror. It was Mike who first found voice, as usual. "Margaret Kelly," he said almost sternly, "have you gone stark mad?"

The woman did not seem to hear. She drew with trembling fingers the little tokens which she had deposited in her bosom after rescuing them from the black stocking. "Poor child!" she droned. "It is the way with disappointed love: it drives some to the savings bank, some to the gutthers. It drove this Margaret to the bank, that Margaret to the margue."

No one offered any elucidation of this enigma, so the woman continued: "Sit down, me frinds, for I have a long shtory to tell ye — aye, and a true one. Oh, you will never regret. Do y' see this picture — these letthers — this lock o' hair? Listen!"

The company sank back into their seats in the tense silence. "It is the unspoken history of a good woman's first and last love affair, if I do say so mesilf, and you will belave it, ivery word." She made a gesture to close the door of the middle room, beyond which were gathered a few of the curious whom the mysterious power of death draws rather than repels.

"It is jus' tin years ago, comin' Saint Pathrick's Day, thot I first met Danny McFee, at the ball of the 'Ancient Order of Hibernians.' An' whin I say thot he was as foine a young gintleman as iver breathed the breath of hiven and made love to an honest girl, I mane it on me heart, whativer has since come bechune to part us. Nor was I the only one to fall in love wid him thot night — but no matther. Danny was the ideel of the thrue man, a soldier in form and manners, tinder with the fair, wid some money and plinty of promise as a risin' lawyer in the full of the political shwim.

"Well, I moight as well confess, unbeknownst to anny of ye, Danny and I mit of a Sunday afternoon at ould Aunt Bridget's in Harlem for a stroll in the park to make our plans and build castles on hope, for we had everything to make the heart of the lover glad. During the wake we wrote daily letthers; and for

fear some one might discover it, I took a private letther-box around the corner on the avenue where a Frinch Jew kept a cigar and news store. For many months I recaved the daily confession of the brave man's love, such as I treasure to this day. But suddenly, though I was faithful in ivery word and thought to me Danny, I got no replies to me letthers, though he swore that he had regularly done his duty. This was the cause of the first coolness. But one day I found a letther in the box — and such a letther it was! It called me ivery swate name in the catalogue, makin' appointments and endin' with untold millions of kisses. It was signed 'Tom Farrell,' but such a name I niver knew. Well, I t'rew the letther away; but the nixt day, instead of one from me Danny, there was another from 'Tom Farrell.' And on the day followin' another, so that by Sunday I had foive. With much misery then I called at Aunt Bridget's, resolved to lay the whole mysterious matther before Danny, for I was beside mesilf wid worryin'.

"But, alas, alone wid Danny I lost heart. I saw from his coolness that he thought me lyin' when I said I had not recaved his letthers; and I — well, I thought him playin' the fool wid me. I saw trouble brewin', but did not think it would come so soon. But to me shame the next mornin' I found the package of strange letthers missin' from me pocket, and then came a messenger from Danny wid a cruel note. 'It's all over, Margaret,' says he. 'That pack of letthers explains everythin'. I found thim on Aunt Bridget's flure, where you dropped thim. My God! why did you not tell me, like an honest girl,' says he, 'that you loved this man more than me? But that's the end. I am writin' this on board of the *Juliet*, bound for Austhralia,' says he, 'so good-bye! Be happy wid your "Tom Farrell," whoever he is,' says he, 'but truer to him than to me, or you will rue it. Good-bye, foriver, Margaret, though you are the only woman I iver loved or iver will love, so help me God,' says he," and the narrator bent down, her lank frame riven with sobs.

"Well, me frinds, this shock well nigh brought me to me bed, so it did, but the next day I recaved another, which did it completely. Wid all me poor soul burnt out wid rage at the injustice, ashamed and sick at heart, I wint around the corner to give

up the kay to the accursed letther-box. Opening it for the last time, there, to me horror, I found another wan of thim 'Tom Farrell' letthers, and a damon's fury came into me heart. I had torn the thing in twain whin, looking up, I saw a pale little woman enter, advance straight up to me letther-box and stand stock dumb. Thin, as she turned and saw the rent sheet in my hand, she flew at me like a tigress. 'Give me that letther!' she screamed, clawin' my face to shreds. 'Who are you? Is it you who have been sthalin' me letthers for the past week?' she yowled, her face purple wid righteous anger.

"'No,' says I, calmly, 'it's you who have been sthalin' mine.'

"''Tis a lie in your t'roat!' says she. 'An' I now d'clare to God that your thavin' of me letthers has lost me the besht mon in the worruld—'

"'Wrong again,' says I. 'You may have lost the next besht; but it's I who have lost the besht, t'rough your thavin' of me letthers.'

"'I'll have you arristed!' says she.

"'I'll have you hanged!' says I.

"'What's your name?' says she.

"'Margaret Kelly,' says I.

"'Wha-a-at!' says she.

"'Before the livin' God!' says I.

"The little woman covered her face wid her hands. 'An' so is mine,' she moaned. And we two Margaret Kellys stood starin'.

"'Thin, if this letther is yours," says I, 'others that I have are yours too.'

"'An' I can return the complimint,' says she. 'For here is a boonch of love letthers from a mon I niver heard of.' An' she passed over to me the precious boondle of poor Danny's declaration of undyin' affiction. Thin we jumped into that blundherin' sheeny, the both o' us, for he had given us both the same box, thinkin' we were one and the same, and aiche av us lost a good mon in consequince. An' whin we got t'rough wid the blundherin' postmaster, he weren't fit for a doormat to a mud cabin.

"But, proud born as I was, I took me poison like a leddy. Divvil a bit did I explain to Danny, even had I known his whereabouts. I jus' bookled down to makin' money and savin' it;

while she, poor craythur, fell away to a shadow after thot, for I met her once or twict, and losin' her hold on life, she wint to the wrong. Ye know, disappointed affiction works different ways on different peoples — the makin' of some, the breakin' of others; an' though I still love Danny McFee wid all me poor heart, divvil a step would I take to repair his injustice or — "

Margaret had risen and stood quivering, with her clenched hands thrown wide; but her mood of vindication was interrupted by the sudden presence of one of the guests from the still chamber beyond. His face wore a peculiar expression as he said, "There's a man at the other door. Has a boondle of flowers. Says he knows the poor dead woman and wants to pay his last respicts — "

"Let him in!" cried Margaret. "By hivens! it's the mysterious 'Tom Farrell,' so it is. Let him in. Ah, now that I have seen the little woman who robbed me of my happiness widout knowin', I think I'd loike to set eyes on the man who, from the same cause, robbed us both." She started to follow her leader, the company fired with a strange sense of curiosity.

By the time they reached the threshold of the darkened room, however, they all paused, for the stranger had entered, laid a mass of white roses upon the casket, and was kneeling beside it with his cheek against the lid, his face hidden in his encircling arms. This pitiful rite brought a hush like that of the sepulchre itself; and when at last the mourner lifted his bearded countenance and straightened, tall and almost spectral in the semi-darkness, he gazed upon the astonished faces that gleamed white and phantasmal against the deep shadows.

"Thank you, my good people," were his first words after recovering from his embarrassment. "I know that I have no right to be here, but I could not resist, for I once knew this good woman well — aye, loved her and love her memory now."

The plaintive quiver thickened many a throat with compassion, and more than one advanced as if to offer the stranger comfort.

"Yes, good friends, I loved her, and she was once my promised wife. But there came a misunderstanding between us, and fool that I was, instead of solving the mystery which was the cause of it, I laid all the blame on the innocent, and we parted, never to meet again till now with the Great Shadow between. You who

are young, listen and take warning. If ever you love and are bound to another with all your heart and mind, and there comes a cloud between, do not part so. Wave the cloud away, then part if you must. That is all. I thank you more than I can say, kind friends, for this precious moment, and I shall carry the memory of it to my dying hour. And now, before I go, may I have just one last look at the departed? Do I ask too much?"

It was Longshoreman Mike who came forward, his cheeks glistening with tears. "Stranger," he faltered, "it's you that can't ask anythin' here that you can't have to your heart's contint, God savin' you, sor!" Reverently he removed the lid from over the still face, motioning for the light.

The stranger bowed low and with that stony calm which is expressive of deepest emotion in a strong man. For some few tickings of the old clock he gazed upon the marble features, then leaped back with a strange exclamation. "But that — that is not Margaret Kelly," he cried. "I — I must have been misinformed." He tore at his neckband as if choking. "That is not Margaret Kelly — *my* Margaret — "

"Nor ours ayther," groaned Mike. Then, dropping the lid, he rushed upon the stranger, who recoiled from him. "F' the love o' Gawd, man, who are you?" he panted. "Are you not the mysterious 'Tom Farrell?'"

The sound of that name was like a blow that brings blood. "I — 'Tom Farrell?'" groaned the stranger. "No, no, God forbid! That's the man whose unknowing wrong it was that parted my love and me. My name is Daniel McFee!"

A wild voice pierced the gloom. Out of the shadows there came a woman's figure, swift as a whirlwind. "Danny, Danny, Danny!" she called out, in the agony and the joy of her heart, and flung herself bodily into the stranger's arms. It was the original Margaret Kelly.

The Father of his Country.*

BY FRANK E. CHASE.

IT would have been a striking spectacle upon a New England country road, and it lacked its due effect under its present circumstances only because, as far as the eye could reach over the treeless and illimitable prairie, there was not a living creature in sight to behold it. It was a caravan of three vehicles, drawn by sorry-looking teams of horses. One clumsy wagon, covered with a tilt that had once been white, was the prototype of the "prairie schooner" of later days. The others were gaudily painted vans, boldly inscribed with the legend:

"PROF. TODHUNTER'S GREAT MORAL WAX WORKS."

Day after day, week after week, it had crawled along over the untravelled plains, toward the golden promise of California. The railroads which now make this journey a trifling affair had not then been built to simplify the managerial problem, but in managerial energy the dauntless Todhunter was ahead of his time, and he did not permit mere difficulties to stand between him and the professional rewards of the new El Dorado. There were, besides, compensations. He had exhibited, with varying fortune, as long as there were settlements to provide audiences; and if the pace of his little procession was that of the snail, it characteristically carried its house along with it, for the canvas-covered cart bore all his household — his wife and two children. There was his vine and fig-tree, there his hearth and fireside; there, or thereabouts, he ate and slept, looking forth when he chose upon illimitable acres that were at least as much his as they were any other qualified voter's.

True, it was always "moving day" with Professor Todhunter, but it was an orderly and habitual moving day, quite without the anxieties that beset an urban householder; and every change was

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for the better because it carried him so much farther west. Altogether, his progressive domesticity had been a rather pleasant business, his closet containing but one skeleton — the noble redman. But now the end of his long journey was near at hand, and the dread of this peril of the road had all but worn itself out and given place to a pleasant sense of security.

Thus it was with him in the afternoon of an oppressive day when, all at once, the horses, guided by some instinct, suddenly pricked up their ears and quickened their weary pace, and the driver of the foremost wagon, looking ahead, saw the tree tops that told of water and a camping-place. He announced the long hoped for discovery without excitement.

"There y'are, guv'nor — right ahead," he called out, lazily.

Professor Todhunter rose up at the sound from the seat of the tilt-wagon at the rear of the caravan, and from this elevation peered ahead under his hand without speaking. As he did so the curtains behind him parted and a woman's face looked out.

"What is it, Bill?" she said.

"Matthias seen suthin'," replied her husband, still staring intently ahead.

"Not Injuns?" she asked, anxiously.

At this word two children, a boy of twelve and a little girl, appeared at either side of her.

"No, not Injuns, M'ria," he said, reassuringly. "God's country ag'in. Trees. An' grass. Giddap!" And sitting down again he smote his horses a leisurely and impersonal blow with the reins, at which they slightly quickened their pace.

"Ain't they goin' to be no Injuns, pop?" said the boy, an active lad, brown of skin and resolute of eye.

"You don't wanter see no Injuns, Sam," replied the father.

"Yes, I do," said the boy, sturdily. "That's all I come for."

Professor Todhunter chuckled proudly at this as the boy climbed to a seat at his side and looked sharply about him after the manner ascribed by his favorite writers of fiction to that justly celebrated connoisseur of Indians, Comanche Dick. For days he had been traversing the broad theatre of this fabled hero's exploits, but fortune, who had been lavish of her gifts of adventure and aboriginal gore to that favored personage, had hitherto denied him.

Suddenly, far away to the north, his roving eye caught sight of a moving speck crawling like a fly along the line of the horizon. Soon another speck appeared, then another and another. As the boy gazed breathlessly at this phenomenon, which was eloquent with meaning to the faithful student of the career of Long Tom the Scout, the Professor's satisfaction at the prospect of camping expressed itself in a quavering, but resonant scrap of a half-forgotten hymn, more or less appropriate to the circumstances of his approaching deliverance:

"He gave my sharpest torments ease,
And silenced all my fears."

A violent nudge from Sam, who was pointing in speechless excitement at the ominous signs in the north, interrupted his song at this point, and he looked enquiringly in the direction the lad indicated. Though he lacked the second-hand experience of his gifted offspring, it did not take him long to make up his mind.

"Injuns!" he ejaculated; and his energetic "whoa!" sufficed to bring the entire caravan to a standstill. The creak of the axles had hardly ceased when, as if by magic, the moving specks entirely disappeared from the horizon.

Sam's vast, if wholly vicarious, experience of Western life easily enabled him to read these signs aright, and he expounded their meaning with obvious pride to the excited little council that was gathered about Professor Todhunter. The Indians had been watching them and knew by the stopping of the wagons that they had been observed. They numbered a score or more, and must have been headed for the water-course ahead.

Professor Todhunter's first idea was to push on and gain, if possible, the shelter of the trees before attempting to withstand the inevitable attack, but he had not gone far when the Indians reappeared so much nearer than before that it became evident that there would be no time for this. In the clear air of the plains he could now see them with some distinctness, although they were still three or four miles away. It was clear that with the overwhelming odds of at least ten to one in their favor they would not wait until night, but that they were planning an open attack which could not be delayed for more than fifteen or twenty minutes, even if the caravan were to be kept moving at its best speed. There

would thus be no time to reach shelter, and there was no other cover in sight — only rolling prairie with low knolls rising here and there from its own face.

So he again called a halt, and summoned his little fighting force of two men and a boy.

"Boys," said he, slowly, "we've got ter take keer of ourselves the best way we kin, an' there ain't much time ter spare. This ain't much of a pitch for Todhunter's Great Moral Wax Works, but my rule is to allus give the best show I kin fer the money, an' please the public."

And Matthias, whose professional relation to the entertainment when on exhibition was that of ticket taker, responded with a dismal grin:

"Well, guv'nor, this'll be the fust time I ever tried to let in all the dead-heads I could."

Their arrangements were soon made. The Professor chose a spot near at hand where his movements were concealed by a knoll, and then hastily arranged his three wagons in a triangle with the horses in the centre, barricading his wife and little girl behind a wall of bedding and supplies within the tilt cart. Sam was sternly counted out of the defending party, to his absolute despair. Nothing but an adroit appeal to his chivalry had kept him from absolute revolt.

"No, Sam," Todhunter had finally said; "you stay in the cart with your ma an' sister, an' take keer o' them."

These were precedents for this sort of thing among the myriad experiences of Comanche Dick, so Sam reluctantly yielded. This left an effective garrison of three men, opposed to an attack from perhaps ten times that number. There were plenty of guns, to be sure, and the Indian of the fifties was only occasionally supplied with that weapon, and still employed very largely the aboriginal bow and arrow, but the odds were fearfully against the attacked.

The Professor finally broke the anxious silence:

"Ef we could only have reached cover," he said. "Then they couldn't have told whether we was three or thirty; but out here we can't make no show at all."

"Sam 'ud count one for looks," suggested Matthias; "an' he's 'bout as safe out here as in the cart."

"Bully for you, Mat," cried the quick-eared lad, thrusting out his head. "Lemme come out, pop. I kin fire a gun jest as well as if I was growed up." In another instant he had climbed down among the men.

"Ah, Sammy," said his father, patting him proudly on the head, "you're a good one, but you're only one, and we want ten."

Sam was looking at the legend on one of the wax-work vans, and his face was luminous with an idea.

"B' gosh! we've got 'em!" he cried.

Todhunter stared.

"Yes, we've got 'em," shouted the lad. "What's the matter with George Washington?" And he pointed at the van.

Forty years later the trio would have automatically responded, "He's all right," but the formula was as yet unborn. But Sam's meaning was clear to them at once. The idea of a free performance of Todhunter's Great Moral Wax Works was repugnant to the managerial mind of the Professor, but its utility under the circumstances was obvious to him.

It was an inspiration, and with desperate haste all hands set about carrying it into effect. In a twinkling the vans had been opened and a great variety of celebrities, both of peace and war, had been unwrapped and prepared for action. Their uniform cheerfulness of expression brought solid encouragement to the hearts of the little garrison. They looked so human and appeared so calm and confident and unterrified that fear seemed contemptible beside their magnificent example. They were very generally clad in military uniforms, which gave a certain sense of protection through association of ideas. In a very short time they had been effectively bestowed.

The post of honor was assigned, at Sam's suggestion, to George Washington, who was propped up in a conspicuous position at the junction of the two vans, facing the direction of attack. At a commanding height above the driver's seat of the van he stood boldly forth as the ostensible leader of the defence. A set expression of vast benevolence which the artist, from patriotic motives, had given to his countenance, and an aspect of supernatural calmness in a position of the greatest peril, were well calculated to impress his opponents.

Below him, peering out between the wagons, looked the stern face of Oliver Cromwell, to whom the artist had given a mien of contrasting truculence and unyielding resolution. At the other end of the van, next the tilt cart, stood Napoleon I., with folded arms and an air of command, the breeze toying with his characteristic beauty-lock, which rose and fell upon his forehead with a menacing effect, like the hair upon a dog's back. Below him was disposed a protean effigy, representing variously any malicious criminal that chanced to occupy public attention for the time being. A countenance of singular brutality, heightened by bushy eyebrows and a rough shave, formed a combination calculated to appal the stoutest heart.

Benjamin Franklin dominated the third angle, bearing in one hand a Leyden jar, at which he gazed with an abstraction that under the circumstances was sufficiently remarkable. Below him stood the Duke of Wellington, presenting a somewhat insignificant appearance in his relatively sheltered situation between the carts. His cocked hat was not, however, without a certain effect. The classic features of William Shakespeare, flanked by Queen Elizabeth and Benedict Arnold, looking bravely forth above one of the vans, while Lucretia Borgia, her essentially masculine traits reinforced on either hand by the counterfeit presentments of Grimaldi and Daniel Lambert, effectively manned the other. Lindley Murray, Lord Byron and the poet Cowper bestrode the tent covering of the wagon, beneath which looked forth the seductive countenance of Mary, Queen of Scots, while as many minor celebrities as could be accommodated were set up in a strategic semicircle before the wagons, where they amply corroborated the claim of Professor Todhunter's small bills in being "as large as life and twice as natural."

Behind this fraudulent array was stationed the living garrison, with such skill as Professor Todhunter's limited experience could command.

"The Injuns are bound to aim at their heads or hearts, boys," he cautioned; "so keep your heads well below the figgers' waists."

And after this fashion they were stationed: The Professor behind Napoleon I., over whose hip his rifle was levelled, Matthias on the ground behind the petticoats of Mary, Queen of Scots, while the

other driver found in the burly figure of Cromwell the sense of moral and material support that he required. Little Sam had arrogantly seized upon the post of greatest honor, behind the bulging calves of the Father of his Country. Thus far, all these preparations had been screened by the knoll from the sight of the approaching Indians, who, hoping to instantly terrorize the three lonely drivers into submission, came galloping over the rise at full speed, and were taken wholly by surprise by the appearance of these unexpected reinforcements. As they swerved sharply on the down slope they let fly a shower of arrows at their waxen opponents, and received in reply a volley that made one "good Indian" and partly made another. George Washington, by his attorney, the disciple of Comanche Dick, fired the first shot, with a result that would have been a credit to either hero, and Sam was proudly conscious of having made a successful début as an Indian fighter.

The Professor cautioned his men to lie low and await their opponent's second attack and when the Indians again charged round the knoll they were met with a second deadly volley. By this time the wax works presented a curious spectacle. An arrow had torn through the calm countenance of Shakespeare, lending to his features the appearance of a derisive smile; but he had not so much as winked. Oliver Cromwell had received three arrows through his heart and had lost an ear, but had suffered no abatement of his truculent mien, as was, perhaps, not unnatural. Daniel Lambert alone had succumbed, having fallen backward from his perch in consequence of his unwieldy bulk. Franklin's Leyden jar was shattered in pieces, but the calm eye of science continued to gaze upon the place where it had been, quite undismayed. Napoleon Bonaparte's head had fallen off at the first volley, but Todhunter, from behind, had deftly caught and replaced it. All the other figures were more or less full of arrows, but George Washington, as the ostensible leader of the defence, had been given especial attention and resembled nothing so much as a human pin-cushion. Like the rest, he bore his hurts with an easy nonchalance. The spectacle they afforded of heroic endurance and supernatural vitality would have staggered the most intelligent beholder; to a superstitious savage, it was simply appalling.

Loading as quickly as possible, the little garrison awaited the next onslaught, which proved to be a flank movement. Hastily shifting their positions, the well-masked quartette checked this advance with a third volley, but as the Indians swept by the battered array of waxen notabilities and noted the cheerful invulnerability of their unprecedented foes, a panic fell upon them. It was not a repulse, it was an utter rout, and with a wild howl of superstitious terror, they fled in disorder over the knoll and disappeared.

After an anxious interval, Professor Todhunter ventured to reconnoitre the top of the knoll. Nothing was to be seen save a cloud of dust rapidly receding into the north. The marvels of Todhunter's Great Moral Wax Works had been too much for the savage mind. And when their owner and exhibitor turned and beheld them, his heart, too, almost failed him.

But the managerial mind is full of resources, and nothing in California that fall made such a hit as Todhunter's Great Moral Wax Works, "pierced by the arrows of the hostile red-man," as the bills announced, more profitable in such dilapidation than ever before. With the few figures that had escaped damage artfully impaled by the spare arrows collected from the battle-field, the lay-out made a terrific picture of savage ferocity. And Sam told the story of the fight nightly to crowded houses at advanced rates, with their silent corroboration, and when asked about the Indians used to say, to great laughter and applause, that he didn't believe they had stopped running yet.

When Time Turned.*

BY ETHEL WATTS MUMFORD.

I DROPPED in at my friend Dr. Lamison's rooms, for I had been dull and bored all day, and Lamison, partly by reason of his profession, partly because of his own odd humor and keen insight, is a delightful companion. To my disgust he was not alone, but deep in an animated discussion with an elderly gentleman of pleasant appearance. Being in no mood to talk to strangers I was about to make my excuses and retire, but Lamison signed to me to remain. "Let me present my friend Robertson, Mr. Gage," he said politely, as we both bowed with due formality. "Robertson," he continued, addressing me, "you will be interested in what this gentleman has to say on the Philippines — he has spent some years out there."

Mr. Gage smiled reminiscently. "Yes, I spent some little time in the Islands. In fact, I am just on the point of going there now, and am very sorry I shall not see them again."

"What?" I asked. "If you're going, why do you say you will never see the place again?"

Lamison broke in abruptly. "That is a long story. Let's go on with the question we had in hand. You were saying that the Malays are singularly shrewd and cunning."

Mr. Gage brightened visibly. "They are, indeed. Now, when I was in Manila," — and he launched into a highly instructive lecture on the Malay and all his works, talking rapidly and tersely; his phrases full of vigor and originality, his descriptions vivid and picturesque; in fact, it has rarely been my good fortune to listen to so brilliant a conversationalist — though conversation it could hardly be called, for by common consent he had the floor to himself.

Occasionally I asked a question, or Lamison punctuated the discourse with nods of approval as he flicked his cigar ashes on the floor. From the Philippines we wandered to the Chinese empire

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* The writer of this story received a cash prize of $125 in THE BLACK CAT story contest ending March 31, 1900.

and its destiny. Gage had spent two years in Tientsin and Hong Kong and was as well informed and interesting as man could be. His observation was phenomenal, and his memory likewise, and he had a way of presenting his facts that was positively evocative. I felt, after listening to him, that the recollections were my own, so distinctly did he force his mental pictures into my consciousness. He was eminently moderate in all his views, avoiding extremes and holding a mean of charity and common sense that is, to say the least, unusual.

A flash of lightning that stared suddenly through the windows, and was followed by a terrific thunder clap, made us start and pause. Mr. Gage arose and, going to the window, looked out into the murky night, remarking as he did so on the suddenness and violence of storms in the tropics.

I seized the occasion to nod to Lamison. "What a brilliant chap," I said. "I never heard a man express himself so well and sanely — who is he, anyway?"

"A gentleman and a scholar, also my guest for the present," my host answered. "So you think him well balanced?"

"Eminently so," I said heartily. "Not many men could state the facts of an international feud with such moderation."

Dr. Lamison smiled a strange, grave smile.

Our companion came back from the window whereon the heavy wash of the rain was now playing, and refilled his glass from the pitcher of shandygaff.

"So you are just on the point of making your first trip to the East?" Lamison asked, to my unutterable amazement.

Gage nodded. "Yes. In a few days I shall have decided."

I looked blankly at him.

"Then I suppose you will have your quarrel with the family by next week?" my friend went on.

Gage sighed deeply. "Yes, I shall have to go through with it again. Fortunately the worst stages come first, and I have been feeling the after effects for some days already."

Lamison looked at my confusion with amusement.

"Tell Robertson about it all, old man," he said. "He is perfectly trustworthy, and yours is such an interesting story. To begin with, tell him how old you are."

Gage laughed, a quick boyish chuckle, and sprang up gaily, stretching himself before the sparkling fire. "Just three and twenty," he answered hilariously.

I looked at him carefully. His iron-gray hair, the infinitesimal tracery of lines that covered his face and hands like a fine-spun web, and the slight stiffness of his joints, in spite of his quick and rather graceful movements, bespoke a man in the later fifties. I understood now. He was doubtless one of the curious cases of mania which the doctor was constantly picking up and studying.

"Tell him how it happened," Lamison suggested.

Gage's face grew grave. "It's very sad, part of it -- but on the whole I have been blest above all men, for I have lived my life twice over. It was this way" — he sat down once more in the easy chair from which he had risen. "I was devotedly fond of my wife — one of the most charming women in the world, Mr. Robertson; but I lost her. She died, very suddenly, under singularly painful circumstances." His mouth twitched, but he controlled himself. "I was away on business in Washington when the news of her sudden illness reached me. I waited for nothing, but left by the first train. I remember giving ten dollars to the driver of the cab I hailed on my arrival, if he would reach my house in ten minutes. Aside from that the journey is only a blur of strain and horror. My memory becomes clear again with the moment when I saw my doorstep, wet and shining in the rain. I noted the reflected carriage lamp on the streaming pavement. The servant who opened the door at the sound of the stopping of my cab was crying. The house was brilliantly lit and I could hear hurried footsteps on the floor above and catch a glimpse of the blue-clad figure of a trained nurse. I rushed upstairs and into my wife's room. She raised one hand feebly toward me, and a flash of recognition lit up her face for an instant and then faded into waxen blankness. I can't describe that hour — it is too keenly terrible for me to repeat and it is not necessary to the story. At last it was all over, and her dear eyes closed forever, as I thought then. A great emptiness settled upon my brain and heart. Then came a slow tightening and straining sensation somewhere inside the dome of my skull, that seemed as fast as St. Peter's. A snap, sharp as a broken banjo string and perfectly audible, was its

climax. Then I steadied myself and looked about. Nothing had changed. The room was still, for the others had gone and we were left alone together — my wife and I. The silence was awful. Only the clock ticked louder and louder and louder till it beat like a drum. Then I glanced at the timepiece, an ordinary little porcelain thing that my wife kept by her on the medicine table, and a cold fear gripped me as I looked, for I realized that something wonderful and terrible was happening. With each tick the second hand jerked one second *backwards* — the hands were moving around the clock face from right to left. I started, and almost at the same instant I felt the hand I held in mine grow relaxed and warm. I gave a cry. The door opened. The nurse, who had been the last to leave the chamber of death, came in. I saw her do exactly what she had done before — but reversed. Then my sister backed in from the opposite side, exactly as she had walked out, and turning, showed me her tear-stained, convulsed face with the very movement with which she had left us. The others came in; it was a strange phenomenon. The doctor was there now, standing at the head of the bed. I looked at the clock. It was ticking and the hands slowly turning backwards. All at once I realized what had happened. Time had turned.

"I gasped when the thing dawned on me, it was so stupendous. But I saw my sweet wife's eyelids flutter, I saw her breath coming with difficulty, and I suffered once more with all my soul that terrible death agony. She turned toward me and lifted her hand with the gesture I had seen as I entered the room. In spite of myself I rose, and left her. I went down the stairs — the servant was there — I passed out into the street, to find the cab that had brought me standing before the door. I backed in. The horse trotted backward all the way to the station and I found myself on the train speeding backwards to the city I had left to come post haste to my darling's bedside.

"My reason shivered in my skull. If I could not sift this matter I knew I should go mad. The thing was strange past all endurance. So I sat in the train that was carrying me over the miles so recently covered, and considered. A dawn of delight came to me. It would not be so long before all this horror would have doubly passed. I would have to go to the hotel and receive

that terrifying, crushing telegram announcing Isabelle's illness once more. Then I should go over the business that had called me on to Washington, but after that I should go back to my wife to find her strong and well, to live over again the happy years of our married life, to watch her growing daily younger, while I grew young with her. What matter that little tiffs re-occurred — they were so few, and the joy of those years so infinitely great. And that, Mr. Robertson, is just what happened."

He went on, after a pause, in which he seemed lost in happy reverie. "In a week I had grown somewhat accustomed to doing over again the things I had done, only reversed; it seemed almost a matter of course; and, after all, I cared little, for I knew I was soon going to find Isabelle, to be greeted by her good-bye kiss, the same with which she had bid me Godspeed on the fatal journey. I could hardly hold my impatience as, at last, I backed up to the house, and when I saw her standing on the porch as I had last seen her, well and strong, dressed in the pretty gray cloth so becoming to her bright complexion and copper-colored hair, I could have cried with joy. She greeted me as I expected, with good-byes, but my heart sang with delight as we went into the house together. I put down my dress-suit case, and we ate luncheon together, beginning with dessert and ending with the delicate omelette she had prepared herself, in honor of my unusual freedom to lunch with her. We went over our old conversations. I was longing to tell her of my delight in her presence, of my gratitude for the extraordinary reversal of nature that gave her back to me, but I could not, I was under bondage of the past. I could only say what I had said, do what I had done.

"Luncheon over — or rather, correctly speaking, before it had begun — I bade her good-bye in my heart, but greeted her in my speech and went down to the treadmill round of my office work. My recent bereavement made me so tender of her presence, so hungry for the sight of her that my very soul longed to expand itself in loving words and acts; I yearned to do and say a thousand affectionate things, but I could only do as I had done. I began to appreciate how I had let our relations become commonplace, and I hated myself for it. I saw a thousand ways in which I could have made her happier, or spared her pain, yet I could not

take advantage of my new realization of my love of her. Ah, it takes such an experience as mine to make a man understand what he has missed and what he might have been. But even if I could not be to her what I so dearly longed to show myself, yet in my heart no gesture of hers went unnoted, no tone of her voice unloved. She delighted me wholly and completely, and the caresses that I gave her in seeming perfunctoriness, and the words seemingly mere habits of expression, were really the outlet of my soul's yearning to her. We were very happy. For years we were constantly together, and never was wife so appreciated. Then a great fear began to grip my heart. I remember it came suddenly, in the very midst of the little feast we were having to celebrate the first year of our wedded life — our 'first anniversary.' I realized that soon, in the very joy of our honeymoon I must anticipate our separation — the wedding would take place, next we would be engaged, then mere acquaintances, and after that — oh, desolation — it would be before I met her, and I should never see her again.

"I lived that year, our second honeymoon, and the last of our life together, torn between the joy of my returned happiness and the terrible knowledge of my coming loss. The wedding day came and I could have cried out in my agony, but I could give my pain no voice. I had no tears, only smiles and laughter that must be gone through with, though my heart was breaking. Imagine it if you can, sirs. Was ever a man so tried? Then came the period of our engagement, when I knew we were drifting slowly and surely apart — and the happiness and misery of that time was, perhaps, the hardest of all to bear, even worse than the actual slow separation, though after my declaration, when our relations were formal and distant, it broke my heart to see her, whom I had loved so long, treat me as a mere acquaintance; and with it was the awful knowledge that there was no future hope, no possibility of our meeting, on this earth at least. The poignant day of my first meeting with her arrived at last. I saw her, as I had seen her then, so many years before, lighting that conventional ballroom with her presence, a radiant vision, all gold and rose, her tall, graceful figure gowned in soft, filmy drapery. I saw her with all my heart and soul, with all the pent-up memories of my twice lived life, for I remembered it was the first, and

knew it was the last time I should see her. She vanished and I was left alone. For some time afterwards, although I was living over my cheerful, happy-go-lucky bachelor days, I was internally of a suicidal turn of mind, even on my return journeys in the East. I could not resign myself to losing this girl that, according to reversed time, I had never met. But youth is gay, and its recuperative powers strong, and I am growing steadily younger, you see. Then, too, other loves came and went, or rather went and came, and in spite of myself I am able to contemplate my double past with the buoyancy of my second youth. Yet it is all very strange, and recently unaccountable intervals have intruded into my life, such as this evening, for instance. You, gentlemen, are not a part of my boyish past, and yet you seem to be interpolated into my otherwise coherently backward existence. This has been happening for some time, and grows more marked. You may be dreams of my old life that I had forgotten, but I am at a loss to account for it fully. For instance — how could I have foretold then what the future had in store? and yet in one sense that is what I am doing now, in telling you my experience. You must admit that it is confusing."

Gage's story had fairly made me dizzy. I admitted that it was confusing. I hardly knew what to think. I even turned an anxious eye on the clock over the fireplace to assure myself that its hands still moved from left to right. As I faced it, Lamison regarded me with his amused but sympathetic eye.

"I hope to interpolate myself a great deal into your world, Gage," he said. "It's time you stopped in your mad career of growing younger. I don't want you on my hands when you become a troublesome stripling, or even when you have to unlearn your college education."

Gage laughed. "It will be rather hard, but I did enjoy my Harvard days, before I had that row with the family. Whew! How the old man did blow me up! And when I think I have to hear all that over again, it makes me sick." He paused again, and assisted his courage from the cheering pitcher. "Another thing that worries me," he went on, "is this: Have you noticed that, although all the happenings of my life seem to follow in well ordered reverse sequence, what I *say* does *not?* For instance,

by all rights I should repeat my sentences verbatim backwards. 'I am glad to see you,' in reversed language would be, 'You see to glad am I.' Now, in all my years of reversed experiences, although the order of conversation progresses backwards, the sentences themselves make perfect forward sense. This drives me to distraction."

The whole impossible proposition danced before me, but Lamison was evidently delighted.

"Good! Gage, splendid! You are making progress — your logic is returning. I am unspeakably glad."

Gage looked at him wonderingly. "Why should you? It is only more confusing. Ah, well, I should not be unhappy if it were not for the awful prospect of being a baby again. That revolts me, like becoming senile. It is such a horrible thing to become a squirming, senseless infant — it makes me shiver, it keeps me from sleeping, it is a menace too ugly and loathsome to be endured. Fancy it, gentlemen, the ignominy of it — the hideous helplessness."

"We'll find a way to prevent that," Lamison said soothingly. "You are better already. It won't be long before we set it all straight. Come, come, be a man —" for Gage suddenly flung himself on the table, his face buried in his hands, moaning slowly, "I don't want to be a baby — I don't want to be a baby."

This exhibition was so pitiful that I turned to Lamison, almost with tears in my eyes. "Is there any hope for him?" I asked.

Lamison nodded. "Yes, he'll pull through. A condition brought on by overwork and the sudden death of his wife, of whom he was devotedly fond. You see how he is beginning to realize the discrepancies in his imaginary life. He will come out all right — in time."

Gage now had himself under control and sat up shamefacedly.

"Don't mind me, Mr. Robertson," he said. "I don't often break down this way, and I wouldn't have you imagine for one instant that I regret my life. I could not have asked a greater boon of Fate than those happy years restored to me, when time had turned."

He rose gravely, excused himself and left us, and we sat silent and deeply thoughtful, staring into the red embers of the fire.

An Arizona Pastoral.*

BY FRANK H. MAYER.

THE desert gave him up grudgingly, but the Man was stronger, and won his release fairly in that awful conflict between will and elemental malevolence.

But up to the last supreme moment she kept her hot hand on his gurgling throat, and life was dangling precariously on the frayed thread of uncertainty as he made one last superhuman effort in his blindness and pitched headlong into the saving coolness of the Gila.

Early that afternoon his one remaining sense of hearing, sharpened to the exquisiteness of agony, had directed him toward this spot. The sough of hope grew more distinct when, his strength failing, he had fallen to the ground and with ear held low to the sizzling sands had gloried in its accentuation.

Sight, smell, taste, touch and feeling he had none, for the desert had been pitiless and the sun without mercy, but their lack was supplied by an unconquerable and indefatigable will, which impelled him to roll when he could no longer walk. The cactus spines were many and sharp, but in his numbness he felt them not. A "side winder" lying in his path rattled unheeded and struck viciously at his emaciated face, but the heavy beard, matted by coagulated blood and sand, mercifully interposed its horny shield, and the venom was spent harmlessly. A fetid-smelling "Gila monster" snapped its remonstrance and malice at his broganned foot, but the heavy leather had been baked to an impermeable flintiness, and the foul lizard, in toothless discomfiture, turned its dread jaws upon itself in insane rage.

A couple of lean coyotes sneaked in safe distance after the tumbling bulk, their curiosity whetted only a shade less sharply than their appetities, not daring in their cowardice to satisfy either

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— as yet. A buzzard circled croakingly in anticipation overhead, approaching more closely whenever motion ceased and retreating precipitately whenever it was resumed.

But ever the thing rolled on spasmodically until, just as the moon rose up over the rim of that terrestrial hell, it stopped, inert and silent, just on the brink of the goal.

An hour passed, and it moved not. The coyotes, emboldened by its limp passiveness, crept cautiously up and licked their chops longingly. Then one more brave — or more hungry — than the other stole tremblingly so near that his lean muzzle almost touched the extended hand. One ravenous sniff at the outspread feast and the wolf raised his head in a shrill yelp of ecstatic prospection, in which his mate instantly joined.

At the sound the figure shudderingly recovered animation, sprang erect, clutched vainly at his revolver scabbard, made a few tottering steps forward and fell at full length over the low but precipitous bank into the shallow waters, where, even in his last extremity, his indomitable will and trained instinct asserted themselves, and his head sought and found the friendly support of an only half-submerged boulder.

For a long time he lay motionless in the water, his thirsty pores drinking greedily of the revitalizing fluid — which was good for the Man, for by way of his mouth there was no ingress to his parched vitals. The blackened, swollen tongue had long since out-yearned its usual sheath and now protruded in a festering bulb beyond.

But sentiency did not return until the over-strained neck muscles gave way and the head slid limply under the surface. Then there was another instinctive struggle, and finally, on his knees, the Man became in a measure himself again and feebly essayed to clear his eyes and throat.

When the sunbaked crust of grime and blood had been soaked away the Man looked less like a travesty upon his species. The luxuriant beard had generously shielded face and throat, and it was only above the lips that the skin peeled in strips from the blistering flesh. By morning the swollen tongue had been reduced enough to allow of the laving of his shrivelled palate, and with its distension came the sensation of hunger. Whereupon

this invincible, all conquering Man took a chew of sodden tobacco, thanked the gods for waterproof cartridges, and shot a coyote for his breakfast.

When he had eaten, slept and drunk again, he lay by the fire kindled with his magnifying lens and gloated over a handful of dingy rock which, despite its inconvenient weight and angular annoyance, he had persistently clung to in his terrible wanderings. It may have been a lingering remnant of the desert fever in his veins that impelled the frenzied boast, almost shouted aloud in his exultation: "The world is mine!"

The remaining coyote, watching him beyond pistol range, grimly surveyed this environing portion of the Man's possessions and wailed a mirthless laugh of ironical congratulation.

The Man gripped his revolver hard and snarled an imprecation, glaring into the gloom in the direction of the wolf. But his sight was as yet weak and uncertain and the Man had made it a life-long rule to take no chances. That was why he had but one loaded shell left in the weapon just now. He had put two extra ones into that Apache squaw to make sure, and expended another for his breakfast. Therefore he waited for light and the extra strength and steadiness that would come with it; roasted and devoured the remains of his coyote; dug a comfortable sleeping pit in the hot sands with his skinny claws, and slept the deep, refreshing sleep that waits equally on quick convalescence and a complacent mind.

. . . . . .

His sleep was considerably more peaceful and refreshing than that of the day, two weeks before, when he had lain down at the suggestion of the slender Indian girl — who was even now sleeping more profoundly and dreamlessly than he — in order to prepare for his midnight journey into the desert. On that hot afternoon the stuffy bunk in the little sequestered dugout on the edge of the reservation was a bed charged with the live coals of lustful expectancy, on which he tossed incessantly in the heat of impatience. For the Man was an unaccredited Indian trader, doing illicit commerce in rum, rifles and other contraband, with the renegade Apaches and, womanlike, the squaw had succumbed to the temptation of a heavy bribe and promised to show him, sur-

reptitiously, the wonderful mine from which her people extracted the precious nuggets which they brought to him in barter.

Eagerly he had consented to her imperative conditions. He was to go unarmed; they were to travel afoot by night, hiding in the daytime to avoid detection by her tribe, whose vengeance in case of mishap would be quick and fatal to both. He was not to make any maps, bring any of the ore away, or in anywise disturb the formations; he was to go and come blindfolded after the first night's travel and he was never to reveal to living being what he beheld. The bribe was to be two bolts of squaw cloth, an *olla* full of seed beads, a pocket mirror and comb, "much" sugar, coffee and flour, and twenty silver half dollars, half down and the balance on return. The compact was so sealed, the first payment *cached* by the young squaw, and under the pretense of going after a replenishment of stock the Man's absence was satisfactorily arranged for with his dusky patrons, who, for a consideration, also allowed the girl to accompany him.

The Apache woman kept faith, but the Man broke it at the start, for inside his flannel shirt was the heavy revolver he customarily carried there on the "no chances" principle, while ostentatiously professing to be ever unarmed while among his Apache "friends." Moreover, he secretly carried a pocket sextant and chronometer, for the Man had been a civil engineer in his better days and proposed again to take no chances. Once the latitude and longitude of the mine were ascertained, the rest would be easy.

For food he took parched cornmeal, *charqui* and two cans of condensed milk, while the girl carried a lambskin water bag. They were to arrive early on the third morning, he was assured, and this would be enough. At the appointed time his guide released his hand and removed the bandage from his eyes. The Man looked — gasped — and the squaw shrank back fearfully from the menacing lust in his eyes and cowered tremblingly.

They were standing close to the base of a quartz cliff over which, above their heads, thundered a foaming waterfall which fell in an iridescent spray behind them. The face of the cliff was curiously honeycombed and mottled, and in its thousand cells the Man beheld a dull yellow glimmer which focussed at a point

ten feet above his head into a broad band of the same lustre, more than a foot in width and running diagonally across the cliff's entire face.

In an instant he had clambered like a squirrel up to that band and laid his trembling hand upon it, scratching it wildly with his sharp nails. There was no mistaking the nature of the shaving that adhered to his nails, and the Man fell back, limp and enervated, at the squaw's feet, glared at his finger tips and mumbled under his breath. Then he looked again, stretched his hands adoringly towards it and almost sobbed out:

"Mine! By the Eternal God — mine!"

Recovering himself as from a dream, he sprang past the squaw as though unconscious of her presence, gained the open air where he could see the sun, and tore the sextant from its case. Intuitively divining his intention the woman sprang at him like a cougar, screaming fierce reproaches and protests, but he brutally struck her down and took his observations with minute care. Just as he finished his computations he heard a slight rustle and beheld the squaw running like a deer down the rocky trail. Without a moment's hesitation and never a compunction he whipped the Colt's from its hiding place and as the sharp reverberation jarred the echoes the flying woman staggered, and stumbled to her knees. But she was up again in a flash, only to fall at the second report in a writhing, shrieking mass that resolved itself into a motionless, soundless heap as he savagely held the weapon close to the coarse hair and fired again.

"She meant to shake me and leave me to get lost and die in the desert. I'd had to go it alone anyway, and the tribe will never know from her that I have ever been here. And now to make sure — for I can't afford to take any chances."

From the body he quickly abstracted the toilette paint bag which is part of an Apache's indispensable paraphernalia, and from it selected a deep blue pigment. Then with unflinching nerves he cut deeply into the flesh of his arm the record of his observations and rubbed the metallic stain into the bleeding marks. That data was too precious to be lost. He would always have it with him!

The body he subsequently threw into a sequestered ravine

some mile or more away from the treasure cliff, and laughed to see the buzzards circling above it ere he had fairly left. Skeletons look much alike, and identification would soon be impossible if there was, indeed, anything left to base a conjecture on, for a wolf was howling engagingly in that quarter and scent develops quickly under a July sun.

He knew, in a general way, his proper course, but the water holes that had replenished the bag on the preceding days now utterly eluded him, with the inevitable result. The moccasins he had worn during the last day's journey, at the demand of his guide, now became painfully oppressive, and he discarded them for his regular brogans. In another day he was half blind, and the desert soon had him in her grip. For two days before he found the river had he neither eaten nor drunk.

. . . . . .

But the agony was over now and the Man slept as peacefully as a babe. In the gray of the morning he killed an antelope that came down to drink, and feasted again. It was a natural proceeding, but a fatal one, for surfeit brought on a lethargy, and the Man decided to lie *perdu* a little longer and sleep into better strength.

When he awoke it was to find himself surrounded by friends — his Apache friends — who, availing themselves of the opportunity of his absence to replenish their stock of nuggets against his plethoric coming, had visited their treasure bank, discovered the intrusion and subsequently the only half-devoured body, and unerringly trailed him down.

With the subtle humor characteristic of their race they had jokingly tied his hands and feet and when he paled in mortal terror as he saw them examining the specimens taken from his pocket and realized his position, they laughed merrily at his surprise and jested with him on his somnolent endowments.

Then they congratulated him on his enterprise, but gently chided him for his grievous cupidity and ungenerous espionage into the private affairs of his friends. His mild discourtesy to the traitress squaw who had betrayed them they treated with indulgent hilarity and approval as a really excellent practical joke upon that lady which they were especially conditioned to appreciate.

He had only forestalled them in a like pleasantry in her connection, but what a felicity it must have been to have watched the queer wriggling that the "sign" bespoke!

Cochise, the Big Chief, would be there soon; a swift runner had gone to his summons. Solicitously they carried him into the shade of a large cottonwood grove and paid him every gentle attention that they could — he looked so sick, their dear friend!

In the heel of the evening the magnate arrived, with an effusive show of amiable interest. At the council fires that night it was decided, after a full relation of the facts, that their dear friend was to have his desire granted. He should have all the gold he wanted — in barter. They did not insist upon an exchange of sordid commercial ware — all they asked was a few personal mementos of himself.

So the chief himself gave him a double handful of nuggets for his mustache with a small section of lip attached, and his squaw traded the Man out of his granulated eyelids. In slow succession they bargained for his ears and nose, and finished with separate transfer on his toe and finger nails, each successive conveyance being a personal labor of love on the part of the favored bidder, who performed the delicate service with excruciating refinement and skill. In time the Man's wealth had increased to over a bucketful of nuggets, with but nominal concessions on his part, and yet, such is the curse of avarice, it brought him not a commensurate felicity.

The Man even parodoxically longed to die right here in the supreme moment of long desired opulence, but his will, too greatly overtasked in a diametrical groove, had lost its elasticity and failed to respond. He had grown so apathetic now that he even refused to partake in the refection of a freshly killed beef which the Chief ordered in his especial honor, and when they considerately sewed him up tightly in the green rawhide, so as to preserve him for a time from direct death at the jaws of the conscienceless coyotes, and laid him on a sunny eminence directly in command of the treasure cliff, from where he could see and speculate upon its incalculable richness, he even forgot to thank them for their great consideration.

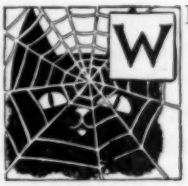
By the time the rawhide had shrivelled into a slender, horny

roll, the Man had lost his sordid lust for the rooted evil that, after all, is but the dross and scum of hell's seething broth, and for many years lay there in placid contemplation of the world which was his undisturbed possession. Gradually he was assimilated into the environment and became an integral part thereof, a thing of the desert with which the wolf cubs played and the whirlwinds familiarly disported. The big-eyed antelope came and looked at it in mild curiosity. The creeping things of the earth and air irreverently toyed with it, and the elements made merry, contemptuous riot about it. The fierce sun seared it with his most fiery resentment; the mourning doves wailed above it their heart-broken sympathy and the horned toads rattled their carapaces against its translucent corrugations in envious admiration of its flinty hardness and crept lovingly into its protecting shelter.

But all unrecked and unheeded. Hate, love and pity were alike indifferent to him, for ambition had departed and the Man did not care.

The Vanishing Window.*

BY RICHARD BARKER SHELTON.



HEN George Vinal brought his bride to the trim little house he had rented in Ludlow Park, it was not without a certain pride that he listened to her exclamations of delight. It was, indeed, a cosy looking place, with its three-story front covered with vines, its bit of grass plot enclosed with a fancy iron fence, and a queer bow-window jutting out over the door to relieve the bareness of a flat anterior.

The recently-made Mrs. Vinal gazed at it from the carriage window, as they pulled up to the curb, and heaved a sigh in which joy and relief were mingled. Vinal suddenly found his face between two daintily gloved hands, and a pair of lips so close to his ear that he felt their warmth was whispering prophecies of their future happiness. And while he was telling his wife that it took no view of their domicile to convince him of such a state, they unlocked the front door and wandered hand-in-hand through the various rooms, anon stopping to listen to their happy voices telling each other it was all their own.

So life began very auspiciously for the young couple at Ludlow Park. Vinal was the teller of a downtown bank. His salary, while not large, gave him immunity from pecuniary worry in their present mode of life; his wife was young, charming, and devoted to him, and his friends, who were legion, came often to his home and declared him the luckiest fellow in the world. Vinal had begun to take this view of it himself, when suddenly his complacency was rudely broken and his pretty dreams for a time clouded. It is not pleasant for a man to realize that his mind is weakening. and it was nothing less than such a realization that forced itself upon George Vinal.

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The house the couple occupied was near the centre of the block on their side of the street. On the other side of the park was a block of plain, brick dwellings, uniform in appearance, one of which, directly opposite the Vinals' house, had been vacant for a long time. Vinal was in the habit of glancing up at the placards every morning, three of them — one in each window of the second story — bearing the legend "To Let," and beneath, the agents' names.

One morning, as he was starting out, his glance wandered, from long habit, to the house opposite. He looked at the placards. There were four.

"Humph," he grunted, "queer," and he lowered his eyes to the first floor. A door and three windows disclosed themselves. He rubbed his eyes. He could have sworn there was a door and two windows on the ground floor and three windows in each of the other two stories. Here, there was a door and three windows on the ground floor and four windows in the others.

"Love is blind," they say, he said laughing to himself, and hurried down the park to his car. Yet, try as he would to treat the matter lightly, and thus rid himself of it, it was continually running in his head that, before that morning, there had been but three windows on each floor.

During bank hours that day, countless incidents persistently haunted his mind — most trivial details of his former impressions of the house — all proving to him that heretofore there had been but three windows. As persistently he laughed these away and charged himself with negligence in his former glances. Yet, when he went home at dusk, he crossed the street before he sought his own door and carefully counted the windows in the house opposite. His results coincided with those of the morning. So, calling himself a blithering idiot, he mounted his own steps.

A week later he had nearly forgotten the incident, when, standing on the steps one morning as he drew on his gloves, he was aware of cold chills running up and down his spine. He had glanced at the house opposite; there were but three placards. Below, was a door and two windows; and on the vine-covered front, three windows only to each floor. For some time he stood there, a strange awe clutching at his throat and perspiration starting from his face. Then he walked slowly down the park towards

his car. Several times, however, he looked back over his shoulder to assure himself that the windows were as he had counted them. His last look, as he stood at the corner of the avenue, netted him a door and two windows on the lower floor and three windows on each floor above.

"Old George must be going the rounds again," one of the clerks remarked that morning, as the teller reached an unsteady hand for a pen.

"Liver pills, George," said the cashier; "musn't let your liver get away with you."

And Conroy, the assistant teller, slyly asked his superior if the breakfast was really as bad as he looked.

Vinal worked through the day in a mental fog. He was neither morbid nor a coward. The uncertainty of those windows had affected him greatly, however, and all day he was trying to recall whether or not there had ever been a case of mental weakness in his family. Before he went home that afternoon, he called on his physician, and requested a thorough physical examination. The doctor thumped and poked and pronounced his patient in excellent condition.

"Perhaps your liver's a little torpid," he said; "try these pills."

The pills, however, did not prevent the house from changing its three windows to four and its four back to three again several times in the course of the next month.

What at first had seemed a trivial matter was rapidly assuming menacing proportions. Vinal began to doubt himself, to exercise the most painstaking care in his accounts and the counting of money. Sometimes depositors were kept waiting several minutes while he ran through the bills again and again to satisfy himself as to his accuracy. He found himself counting the trees and posts on his way down town, and if, through some mischance, the results varied from morning to morning, his nerves played him sad tricks for the rest of the day. And still the house continued to vary its display of windows — from three to four and back again to three.

Vinal began to watch for some regularity in these changes, but he discovered none. Sometimes for weeks the house remained the same. Sometimes he came home at night to find it had changed since morning, and this often happened for several succes-

sive days. As the weeks went past, he grew depressed. If his wife made mention of this, he assumed a levity the very extravagance of which marked it a sham.

At the bank, too, the once genial teller had become a man of the fewest words.

"I hope," said the cashier anxiously to his wife one night, "that Vinal is keeping within his income. I don't like his actions of late."

One cold February afternoon, as Vinal stepped into the little parlor in Ludlow Park, a miserable figure rose to greet him. It was his wife, and there were traces of tears on her face.

"Oh, George," she said, clinging to him, "I thought you'd never come. I've kept quiet as long as I could — it will sound so foolish to you — but I can't stand it any longer. The house opposite — there's something very strange about it. I — I believe something's wrong with my head."

Vinal sank into a chair. "Thank God," he exclaimed, fervently.

"Oh, I can't believe — did I hear rightly? I — I — " Mrs. Vinal was on the verge of hysterics. Her husband sprang from the chair and caught her in his arms.

"My dear," he said, gently, "try to be calm. I thanked God that you, too, have noticed — "

"Have — have you seen it?" she asked, in astonishment.

"I have," he replied, "and if we both have seen it, it proves we are equally sane or equally crazy."

He drew her down beside him on the couch and they compared notes on the strange house until it was quite dark. The sharing of the mystery had relieved each of a great mental burden. Vinal was actually laughing when his wife told him how for days she had watched the house, and how terrified she had been each time it so mysteriously changed its appearance.

"Dear," she said, "we'll move away. There's something uncanny about it. Let's not stay here another week."

Then the man in him spoke.

"No," he said, sturdily; "not until we know about this thing. Then, if you still want to move, we will."

"But, George, how in the world shall we find out about it?"

L. of C.

He took both her hands in his own.

"I know you trust me, and that you're a brave enough little woman to do what I ask," he said. "We'll hire that house."

The next afternoon Vinal went to the office of Standish & Jordan, who had rented him his house, and who controlled most of the other property on Ludlow Park, including the house opposite.

Jordon greeted him cordially.

"Everything's all right at the house I hope," he said.

"Yes, quite," Vinal responded. "However, I think we'll make a change. Is No. 48 still vacant?"

"Great Scott! You don't want to go over there, do you?" the agent enquired, with evident astonishment.

"Well, you see," said Vinal, "we — er — we want a little larger place and I'm rather partial to north exposures."

"Well," said Jordan with decision, "you don't want that house. It's a regular box compared to yours. Besides which, I can tell you something queer about it. Heavens, man! Don't look at me like that. It isn't haunted."

"I — I beg your pardon," said Vinal, striving to regain his composure as he settled back in his chair.

"That house," Jordan began, "old man Ludlow built for himself after his own plans, but the old man died before it was finished, and it has never been occupied. What his idea was in building such a trap, goodness knows. We've tried to have the heirs let us alter it, but they won't have it. Sentiment about the old chap, I suppose.

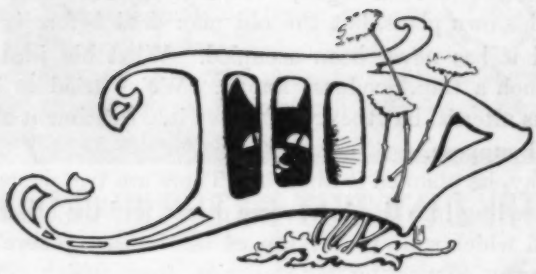
"As I say, he planned it himself. There are two doors side by side, one leading into the front room direct, and the other opening into a hall which runs to the top of the house. There's a bare little stairway connecting the galleries, from which the rooms open like tiers of cells. That house is the standing joke of the firm. Standish, over here, claims the living-room door is the proper one, and I favor the other. We are agreed on one point only — that the sight of both doors would drive away any prospective tenant. So we've had a window built to fit the doors, and by shifting it from one to the other we get our one door. A little pulling of the vines hides the fact that the window is a sham. When I go up to look after the place, I move the window

to the living-room door, and put up an extra placard in the window above the hall door. When Standish goes up, he moves the window back, so that it appears, together with those directly over it, to belong to the adjoining house, and takes down my placard. In fact, we have a little wager up as to which will win us a tenant, the three windows or the four.

"Really though, Vinal, I don't believe you want that place — and I doubt if anyone else will."

That night Vinal and his wife stood looking at the house across the street.

"I think, my dear," he said, "I'll bet on the four windows."



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